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## THE NATIONAL LENDING LIBRARY FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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ON seeing the above title, the reader might ask a number of questions. This article attempts to anticipate and answer those questions.

### **What is the National Lending Library?**

The National Lending Library for Science and Technology (N.L.L.) is a Government organisation within the Department of Education and Science. Its job is to collect and make available the world's literature in the field of science and technology (including agriculture and medicine). The main difference between the N.L.L. and all other large scientific libraries is that its primary purpose is to provide a rapid postal loans service. In other scientific libraries, lending takes second place to their principal function which is usually to provide a reference service.

### **Where is the National Lending Library?**

The N.L.L. is situated at Boston Spa in the West Riding of Yorkshire. A site in the North of England or North Midlands was necessary to enable the Post Office to provide a "return of post" service to all parts of the United Kingdom. At the time that the N.L.L. was being planned, a Royal Ordnance Filling Factory near Boston Spa was going out of production and some of its industrial buildings were able to be adapted. By using existing buildings on land which was already Government owned, the N.L.L. was able to start operating in half the time and at half the cost than would otherwise have been the case.

### **Why is there a National Lending Library?**

In the past, the method of using libraries was for the scholar to travel to the library and to consult the literature he required within the library building. This is still an acceptable method for workers in the humanities. A scientist or technologist however, cannot travel to the literature collections. His work centres on his laboratory or workshop and when he needs to consult an item of literature he requires it in his place of work as soon as possible. In this century, as the numbers of scientists and technologists increased, so inter-library lending increased since, in most cases, the library of the organisation to which the scientist belonged could not hold all the material he needed. In order to locate material required on loan, libraries compiled union catalogues which listed the holdings of a number of libraries. When an item was required on loan, the union catalogue would be consulted and a location might or might not be found where the item might or might not be available. This took time and led (and still leads) to delays in obtaining items on loan.

It is obvious that lending directly from a comprehensive central collection must be quicker and more efficient than transmitting requests to one or more possible locations. Before the war, the Science Museum Library in London attempted to make a collection of the world's scientific and technical literature and to provide a postal loans service. With the increase in both scientific workers and scientific literature after the war, running this

service took an increasingly large amount of the time and resources of the library whose primary function was to provide a reference service.

In order that the library needs of scientists and technologists should be met adequately, it was decided that a National Lending Library for Science and Technology should be set up and that it should take over the lending function of the Science Museum Library. The need for such an organisation was confirmed by the observation made in 1956 that only half the Russian scientific literature which the Russians themselves thought worth abstracting was available in this country (Urquhart, 1957). Planning started in November, 1956, lending started in 1959 and the library was officially opened in 1962.

#### **What does the National Lending Library hold?**

The largest part of the N.L.L.'s collection consists of scientific periodicals. At the present time, about 25,000 current scientific and technical periodicals are received from more than 100 different countries.

In the case of books and monographs as distinct from serial publications, the N.L.L. has been collecting English language books from 1960 and Russian books from 1957. Both are being added to at a rate of approximately 5,000 a year. In addition, books in German, French and other foreign languages are currently being selected and added to the collection. The N.L.L. does not maintain a complete collection of books published before 1960 but the Science Museum Library is prepared to lend older books when required through the N.L.L.

The N.L.L. has a large collection of report literature and this is increasing at a rate of 20,000 reports a year. It consists chiefly of reports of American government-sponsored research and includes the aerospace reports issued by N.A.S.A. and the atomic energy reports issued by A.E.C. In addition, atomic energy reports are being received from 50 different countries and international organisations. A relatively small, but increasing, number of British research and development reports are held.

The N.L.L. makes special arrangements to collect and publicise the proceedings of scientific and technical conferences from all over the world. A quarterly index to these proceedings is published and currently contains about 3,000 entries each quarter.

The N.L.L. has a collection of approximately 75,000 translated articles which are mostly from Russian into English. This collection is increasing by 7,000 translations a year.

#### **Who can borrow from the National Lending Library?**

The N.L.L. lends only to organisations in the United Kingdom and not to individuals. At the present time, over 2,800 organisations are approved borrowers. About half of these are industrial firms, and the remainder include universities and technical colleges, learned societies, research associations, government establishments and public libraries. The main reason why the N.L.L. does not lend to individuals is that it lends particular items when given a complete and correct reference. In order to maintain a rapid service for a large number of loans, very little bibliographic checking can be done in the first instance at the N.L.L. and the librarians of the borrowing organisations are expected to provide correct references. In effect, the N.L.L. is a library for libraries. It is not organised to answer subject enquiries or to deal with indefinite requests of a type only too common in many reference libraries, for, for example, 'a book on Engineering.'

#### **How does the National Lending Library lend?**

The N.L.L. is at present dealing with over 12,000 loan requests each week. The majority of these are despatched on the day they are received. In order to do this, records and indexes are kept to a minimum, the shelves themselves being the main record of the N.L.L. Both periodicals and books are shelved alphabetically by title and, in the case of periodicals, the individual issues are separately bound.

Borrowers purchase books of loan forms from the N.L.L. The cost, £3 for 50 forms, covers postal charge only, the N.L.L. service being free. The forms, which are filled in by the borrower, incorporate a gummed address label for sending out the loan so that the minimum of clerical operations need to be carried out at the N.L.L. When the forms arrive at the N.L.L., they are sorted alphabetically by title and then checked against the shelves. No checking against catalogues or indexes is necessary and consequently time is saved. Full use is made of mechanical handling methods in moving the stock and a punched card system is used for controlling the acquisition and accession of all periodical material.

#### **How comprehensive is the National Lending Library collection?**

The N.L.L. has tried to collect everything within its field that might be required by a practising scientist or technologist. The fact that there is such a large loan demand has helped in making the

collection comprehensive. Every request which is not satisfied is checked to find out the reason for failure and in this way new titles and titles not held are brought to the attention of the selectors. This "feedback" from borrowers, who represent the majority of the scientists and technologists in this country, is a very valuable means of ensuring the comprehensiveness of the loan collection. Surveys of all loans are also carried out from time to time and the data from these surveys used to show whether back issues of periodicals are required and also whether two or more copies of an item are necessary to meet the loan demand.

At the present time, the N.L.L. satisfies 85% of all requests from its own stock. A survey of all requests for current material (published in 1963 or later) showed that the N.L.L. was supplying 95% of the demand. This approaches the optimum satisfaction possible since the 5% remaining consists largely of incorrect or mutilated references and not missing material.

#### **What other services does the National Lending Library provide?**

(a) *Photocopy Service.* The N.L.L. supplies photocopies to anyone anywhere in the world. Pre-paid requisition forms are used for this service.

(b) *Translations Service.* The N.L.L. will arrange for translations of Russian articles to be made under certain conditions.

(c) *Reading Room.* The N.L.L. Reading Room is open to anyone. In it is a collection of reference works and abstract journals covering the whole field of science and technology. Readers can make use of this collection to find references to the original literature which can then be made available to them from the loan collection.

(d) *MEDLARS.* This year, the N.L.L., in co-operation with the Computing Laboratory of the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, is running an information retrieval service based on the American National Library of Medicine's MEDLARS computing tapes. An article about this service appeared in this journal earlier in the year (Harley and Barraclough, 1966).

(e) *Courses in the structure and use of scientific and technical literature.* In order to enable scientists and technologists to make the best use of the available literature and its guides, and also to help

non-scientifically trained librarians, the N.L.L. runs a number of courses. These courses have been held for postgraduate students, university library staff, university academic staff, public librarians and library school tutors. Currently, a number of instruction courses, both for medical librarians and medical research workers, are being run in connection with the MEDLARS service.

Further details of all these services can be obtained from the N.L.L.

#### **How can a member of the medical profession make use of the National Lending Library?**

To borrow from the N.L.L., you must apply through a library that is an approved borrower. All universities and learned societies and an increasing number of hospitals, regional hospital boards and postgraduate medical centres are direct borrowers. Many public libraries borrow directly from the N.L.L. and all others can borrow indirectly.

The photocopy, translation and Reading Room services are available to anyone.

The N.L.L. has the largest collection of medical literature in the country. All periodicals covered by the *Index Medicus* and *Excerpta Medica* abstracting and indexing services are currently received, as are all available periodicals listed in "World Medical Periodicals." All recently published medical books in English and a selection of the more important foreign language books are held. The collection of report literature deserves special mention. This type of literature is not well represented in many libraries and the guides to it are not well known. There is quite a large, and increasing, amount of information in the medical field in these reports and they are very often more up-to-date than articles in scientific journals.

The N.L.L. collection should be available to all workers in the field of medicine and if your library is not already a borrower and you consider that they should be, ask the librarian to consider applying to become an approved borrower from the N.L.L.

#### **REFERENCES**

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